

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE F-6

WASHINGTON POST
17 December 1984

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Contras: Sen. Durenberger Replies

The column by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak regarding the Senate Intelligence Committee [op-ed, Dec. 10] is based on the erroneous presumption that I am "hostile" to the president's policies in Nicaragua and that I have "contempt for the *contra* guerrillas fighting the Sandinista government."

Far from being thought hostile to our country's policies in Nicaragua, I am considered one of the more visible proponents of maintaining pressure on the Sandinistas by providing strong support for Nicaragua's "freedom fighters." On both occasions in 1984 when the Senate voted on the question of continued assistance to the freedom fighters, I took a leading role in arguing against measures to reduce or eliminate U.S. aid.

The column was apparently based on a Post story of Nov. 29. During that interview, I stated my belief that we must find some means other than covert assist-

ance to keep up our pressure on the Sandinistas.

The continued use of CIA covert assistance violates the statutory definition for such assistance, which allows "activities conducted in support of national foreign policy objectives abroad which are planned and executed so that the role of the United States government is not apparent or acknowledged publicly." That simply is no longer true.

Pressure to continue covert assistance in Nicaragua also erodes confidence in the legitimate and very necessary responsibilities of the CIA and has politicized and divided the Intelligence Committee to the point that confidence is lost in the traditional oversight process. For these reasons I believe we must find some other means to pursue our policy objectives in Nicaragua.

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